**The 4 emotional stages of the Coronacrisis: it’s impact on future society and (work) culture**

We are in a liminal phase, an interim period, in which at a global level old cultural rules no longer apply and we have to seek new ones.

An uncertain situation; a situation that many people are concerned with, both on a personal level (will I get sick; will my loved ones get sick; what if I am not allowed to visit my elderly parents for a long time; how long will I have to live without physical contact and conviviality?) and on a professional level (if the economy collapses, I might lose my job; I find it difficult to be productive with the children at home all day; won't we lose the team spirit by working online; what's the point of all this?). The corona crisis is perceived by most of us as a situation that feels 'unique'.

This is not the case. Not really. Social scientists and historians have recorded many historical and modern cases, of situations in which people were ambushed by an external threat, after which they 'suddenly' couldn't or shouldn't do what they had always done. Wars, for example, or natural disasters, or previous pandemics. Those were personal and collective tragedies for people in their time, which always led to a culture shock in the course of which people had to buy into a new, and often undesirable, situation.

The fact that the corona crisis does not offer a totally new situation for mankind is in fact positive news. Because scientists already know quite a lot about the ways in which people deal with threats and rapidly changing realities, with this knowledge we can make reasonable predictions about how we will feel and behave in the near future. Because, as anthropologist Oberg already showed in 1960: every cultural shock follows a similar path of change.

With this thesis he does not mean to say that people all, in exactly the same way and at exactly the same moments, live through the same emotions and show the same behaviour. That is not the case, and that is also shown by the fact that many Dutch people are currently angry with other Dutch people: because they think the other person is too scared, or just too laconic. Because they don't keep a meter and a half distance when they are standing in the supermarket queue, or because they do. The anger stems at least in part from the fact that people who move through a culture shock have different needs, coping strategies, moral dilemmas and feelings at every stage (Kramer, 2020). And it stems from the fact that different people, in their lives, have learned to react to risk in different ways (van Voorst, 2014). For years I did research into the ways in which people deal with major risks, such as flooding or extreme sports. It showed that there are individual differences in coping strategies, and these in turn depend on things you have experienced earlier in life, plus your own skills.

At the moment, several Dutch people are in different phases. And that causes mutual incomprehension: sometimes we don't understand someone else's point of view at all, and we can feel quite lonely in our own worries.

And yet, broadly speaking, we all go through these different phases. These phases are never easy, but they can be transformative - depending on how people deal with them.

**1 - The initial phase: confusion, despair, gene and differences**

We' ve seen on the news for a while now that Corona was coming. We also heard that it was going to be very unpleasant. But no one could imagine how such a thing, in our own safe Netherlands, would turn out. Nobody knew exactly which information was reliable; nobody knew exactly which behaviour was 'sensible'.

At the same time 'strange' policies are announced: no more shaking hands; stay at a distance - walk across the street if the other person doesn't take evasive action; stay at home as much as possible; cancel your travels. Not everybody immediately does that. It feels exaggerated. Or even ridiculous: tapping elbows instead of the normal greeting is a form of behaviour to which people still had to get used - not everyone feels comfortable with that, and by no means does anyone dare to do it in a group of friends who find it ridiculous. At this stage - despite advice - some people simply go on the holiday they had already booked for a long time; others stock up at the local supermarket and prepare for a long stay-at-home.

**2 - the first habituation phase: rose-coloured glasses, benefits, relief, guilt**

The second phase is such a mixed phase again, but in a completely different way. In this phase, people who do not have to deal with the threat (in this case the coronavirus) too severely, notice that there are also some nice aspects to the new situation. They smile because of the online dinner and other creative initiatives they see all around them, and actually enjoy the fact that they can be more at home. Less time on the train, secretly sleeping late, more quality time with the family: a lot of people thrive on that. At the same time, they often feel a little guilty, because they know that others suffer much more from the virus. Those who are indeed harder hit have - logically - less mental space to enjoy any benefits. They struggle with illness, with fear of death, and with the oppressive situation that has arisen for them at home, now that schools and offices are closed.

**3 - the second habituation phase: the new normal, numbness, acceptance and self-reflection.**

After some time people get used to the new normal. The initial policy becomes structural. People no longer tend to hug their friends when they see them, but stay at a distance. They have rediscovered their work routine, and notice that the online meetings are quite functional. They miss their social contacts, but learn to call intimates a few times a week in order to avoid diluting contact. Actually, everything is going pretty well, and yet.... People feel tired, and sometimes quite desperate when they think that this situation can last for a very long time. Will never stop. Because even if the economy stabilizes, schools and offices reopen, our perceptions and expectations for the future will have changed forever. We are no longer naive. We know that fate can strike, and that we cannot control or make up for everything. With that awareness comes the realization that the old way of life, may never come back. And that is an uncomfortable realization. A sad idea, especially because a crisis like the coronavirus is linked to other crises in the world - the way in which people increasingly dominate natural landscapes, the way in which we treat animals, the moderate wages of teachers and nurses. In this, the second habituation phase, many people are starting to think about today's world and their role in it. About how it has been able to come this far. About why they only notice now, that they had been overworked for a long time. About how the children blossom now that they are home more often, and what that actually entails about the normal course of events, in which day care and school were included. About their own business, which is having a hard time for the umpteenth time. About the concern for vulnerable people in the vicinity.

This phase, painful as it is, is hugely important because it offers potential for fundamental choices and radical transformation. Not only in people's individual lives, but - because we are experiencing this crisis collectively - also in businesses and society. [Please also read my article: when does a crisis become a transformation - and when doesn't it?] ***\*Handig om hier even de originele titel te pakken, kan hem niet (terug) vinden\****

**4 – The recovery phase. A party - and a hangover**

Policies are being loosened, even discontinued. The infrastructure of old life is back on its feet. Schools and offices are reopening, the streets are getting crowded again, you can invite as many guests as you want for a party - and you can embrace them without fear for their or your own health. Many people think that the starting point of this phase will be the same as it used to be. But it won't be just like it used to be. Because people themselves will have changed. They have been thinking about an alternative life, and they have felt a little bit how that could be. And no, that was not ideal, but neither was the old situation, they now notice it. Because in the flex space at work it is just as difficult to work in a focused way as it was before the corona crisis - but many employees now know for sure that they often got more done at home. The traffic jams are becoming just as long again: this time people are feeling more annoyance than before. In the supermarket they annoy people who, without excuse and in apparent haste, graze past them with their shoulders; the city seems to be spinning at too fast a pace, and all those catching up family and birthday visits bring turmoil. The children are also troubled: they complain about busy school classes, demand more days at home.

Not all those complaints and demands will be met. To a large extent, we decide which will and which will not. And if we will have a moment in our lives to do so for our era, the moment is now.

**References**

Kramer, J. 2020. Corona cultuurshock: crisis of transformatie?

Oberg, K.: ‘Cultural shock: Adjustment to new cultural environments’, *Practical Anthropology* 7 (1960), pp. 177–182

Van Voorst, R. 2015. Natural hazards, risks and vulnerability. Routledge: London.